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## By Christine DiGangi, who covers personal finance for Credit.com

A Georgia man says he spent 32 days in a Missouri jail for crimes a former roommate committed. It was a case of [identity theft](#), James Molden told a local news reporter, saying the ex-roommate used Molden's Social Security number and photo ID to open several bank accounts and take out an auto loan in Molden's name.

Molden said he filed a police report in Georgia, but when the thief failed to make payments on the loan and bounced several checks in Missouri, problems intensified, Molden said. He said there were multiple arrest warrants in his name.

Police arrested Molden in Georgia and transported him to Missouri, where he sat in jail for 32 days, he told [WSB-TV Atlanta](#). The charges against Molden reportedly have been dropped.

Molden's story is one of many that illustrate the severe consequences of identity theft, particularly when someone gains access to your Social Security number. Thieves can use it not only to commit financial fraud but also other offenses that may end up on your criminal record. It can also be a way to [file fraudulent tax returns](#) and delay access to a refund you deserve.

There are many ways for consumers to [monitor their credit](#) for signs of identity theft, but it's a crime that's nearly impossible to prevent. Regularly requesting your [free annual credit reports](#), reviewing your credit scores and looking at your account activity will help you quickly find signs of fraud or unauthorized use of your identity, allowing you to take action and prevent further damage.

Ending up in jail as a victim of identity theft isn't the most common fallout of the crime, though it happens more often than you think, but suffering financially is also a severe consequence. Identity theft can damage your credit and increase the cost of loans, insurance premiums and housing.

Other than reacting quickly to news that your information has been compromised in a data breach, you should take the necessary steps to prevent exposing your personally identifiable information. Shred documents displaying your name, address, birth date or Social Security number, minimize the amount of information you make available on your online profiles, and never carry your Social Security card (or anything bearing the number) in your purse or wallet — that's something you want under lock and key.